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NEWS

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For Immediate Release:
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1983

48 HOUSE MEMBERS PRESS PORTUGAL ON EAST TIMOR

WASHINGTON--Forty-eight House members have told Prime Minister Mario Soares of Portugal that they are "deeply concerned over the tragic situation in East Timor," a largely Roman Catholic island territory near Australia, and a former Portuguese colony.

The comments were contained in a letter today to Soares which was timed to correspond to the United States visit of President Antonio Ramalho Eanes of Portugal.

The letter, drafted by Rep. Tony P. Hall (D-Ohio), also urged Soares to step up diplomatic efforts to help secure the internationally-recognized rights of the East Timorese people. Last year, under the previous government, conservative Prime Minister Balsemao of Portugal pressed the matter before the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

The lawmakers also requested special assistance for several families who are trying to leave East Timor but require written assurance that Portugal will accept them.

The letter noted that hundreds of thousands of Portugese citizens living in former Portuguese colonies in Africa, as well as a much smaller number of East Timor residents, have successfully resettled in Portugal.

In a related development, the State Department in a letter to Hall dismissed reports of renewed violence by Indonesian armed forces against East Timorese guerrillas fighting for independence as "not conclusive."

"The State Department sees what it wants to see in East Timor. The recent build-up of Indonesian troops is widely reported," Hall said.

Hall will meet with Eanes during his visit to discuss the current situation in the territory.

The text of the letter to Soares follows.

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EAST TIMOR
ADD ONE

September 15, 1983

Prime Minister Mario Soares
Presidencia do Conselho de Ministros
Rua da Inprensa
a Estrela
1200 Lisbon, Portugal

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

We would like to take this opportunity to offer our congratulations on the occasion of your re-assumption of the office of Prime Minister, and to re-affirm the traditionally strong ties between our two countries.

For some time, we have been deeply concerned over the tragic situation in East Timor. We are aware of Portugal's diplomatic efforts, most recently at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva, to help secure the internationally-recognized rights of the East Timorese people. We applaud these moves by Portugal and hope they will be intensified in the future.

At this moment there is a specific humanitarian matter which we would like to bring to Portugal's attention. This matter concerns the families of a small number of East Timorese, including a Roman Catholic priest, Father Francisco Fernandes, with whom some of us have met in Washington since 1979. Many of us have been involved in initiatives aimed at enabling the families of these persons to leave East Timor for Portugal, but Indonesia has not allowed them to leave. Before we can pursue these cases any further with Jakarta, however, it is our understanding that for technical reasons there need to be written assurances that Portugal will accept the individuals in question.

We would like to emphasize that we are aware of, and salute Portugal's successful absorption of thousands of its citizens from Africa and additional numbers from East Timor itself. The fate of the group of East Timorese mentioned here is of great concern to us, and we are certain that Portugal will want to assist them and enlist the help of diplomatic intermediaries and international organizations for this purpose.

Enclosed you will find a list of the names of the specific individuals in question. We wish to thank you for your assistance in this matter in advance. We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

With kind regards.

Sincerely,

Don Edwards (D-Calif.)
John Edward Porter (R-Ill.)
James H. Scheuer (D-N.Y.)
Henry J. Nowak (D-N.Y.)
Bruce A. Morrison (D-Conn.)
Mel Levine (D-Calif.)
Louis Stokes (D-Ohio)
Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio)
Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.)
Berkley Bedell (D-Iowa)
William Lehman, (D-Fla.)
John Conyers, Jr. (D-Mich.)
Patricia Schroeder (D-Colo.)
Gary L. Ackerman (D-N.Y.)
Douglas H. Bosco (D-Calif.)
Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.)
Tony P. Hall (D-Ohio)
David E. Bonior (D-Mich.)
Doug Walgren (D-Pa.)
Joseph P. Addabbo (D-N.Y.)
Mike Lowry (D-Wash.)
Bob Edgar (D-Pa.)
Barney Frank (D-Mass.)
George Miller (D-Calif.)
Bruce F. Vento (D-Minn.)
Norman Y. Mineta (D-Calif.)
Tom Harkin (D-Iowa)
Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.)
Robert T. Matsui (D-Calif.)
Al Swift (D-Wash.)
Claudine Schneider (R-R.I.)
Lane Evans (D-Ill.)
Tom Lantos (D-Calif.)
Benjamin A. Gilman (R-N.Y.)
Paul Simon (D-Ill.)
Anthony C. Beilenson (D-Calif.)
Mickey Leland (D-Tex.)
Robert G. Torricelli (D-N.J.)
James Weaver (D-Oreg.)
Walter E. Fauntroy (D-D.C.)
Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.)
Sam Gejdenson (D-Conn.)
Matthew F. McHugh (D-N.Y.)
Jerry M. Patterson (D-Calif.)
Peter W. Rodino, Jr. (N.J.)
George E. Brown, Jr. (D-Calif.)
Joe Moakley (D-Mass.)
Ronald V. Dellums (D-Calif.)

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